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[54] ELECTROLUMINESCENT LAMP DRIVER CIRCUIT WITH SIGNAL TRACKING

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[51] Int. Cl.⁶ **H05B 39/09**

[52] U.S. Cl. **315/208; 315/DIG. 5; 315/291; 315/307; 315/209 R; 315/258; 315/186**

[58] Field of Search 315/247, 209 R, 315/169.3, 167, 307, 209 T, 206, 208, 291, 258, 186

[57] ABSTRACT

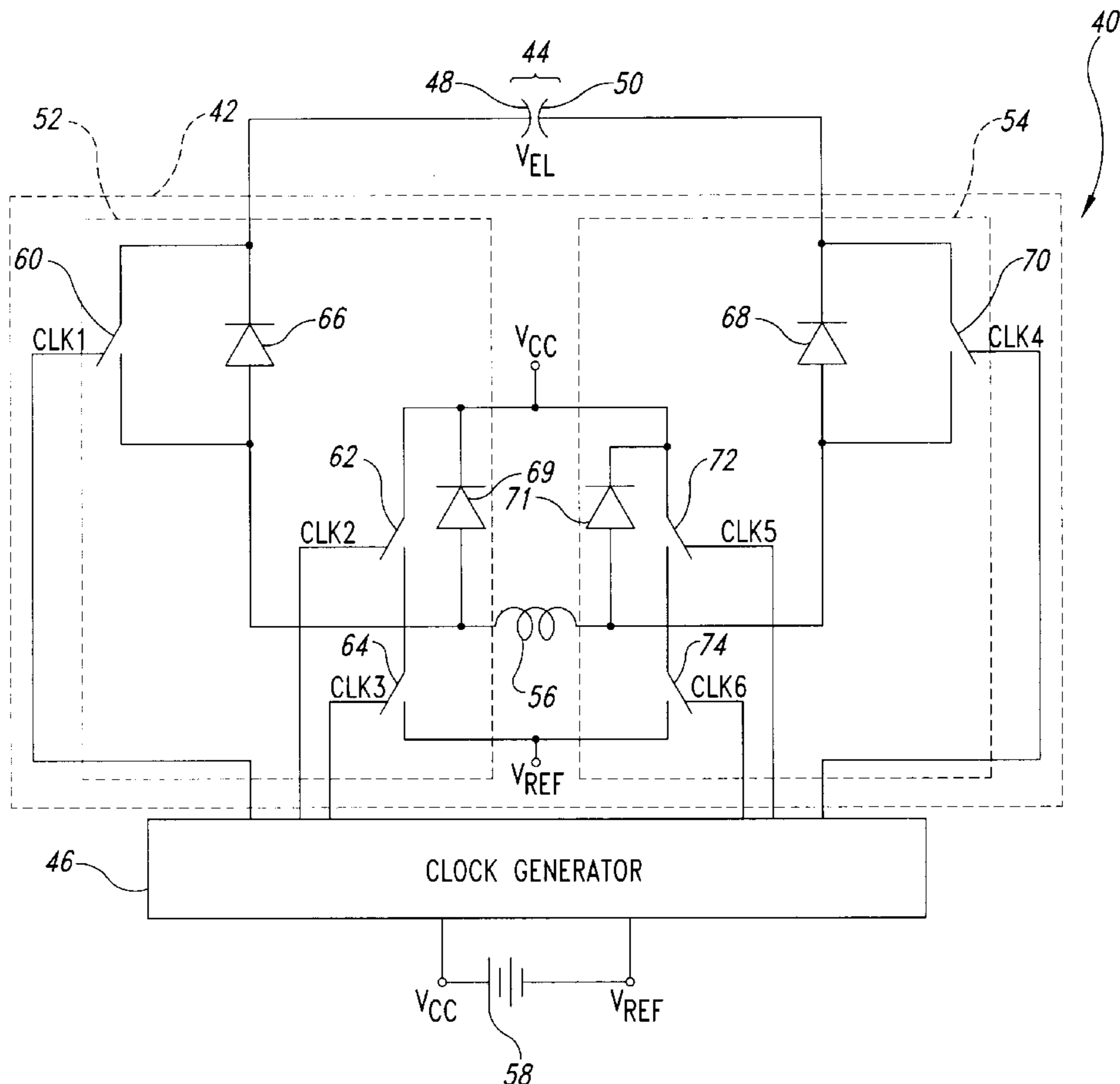
An electroluminescent lamp is driven by a driving circuit that can supply an approximately sinusoidal signal, a bi-directional sawtooth signal or a single-ended sawtooth signal. Switches selectively transfer energy from a battery to an inductor and then from the inductor to the lamp. In one embodiment, the lamp voltage is compared to a reference waveform, such as a sinusoid. The switches are activated responsive to the error between the lamp voltage and reference waveform to minimize the error. The lamp can thus be driven with a closer approximation of the reference waveform.

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20 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



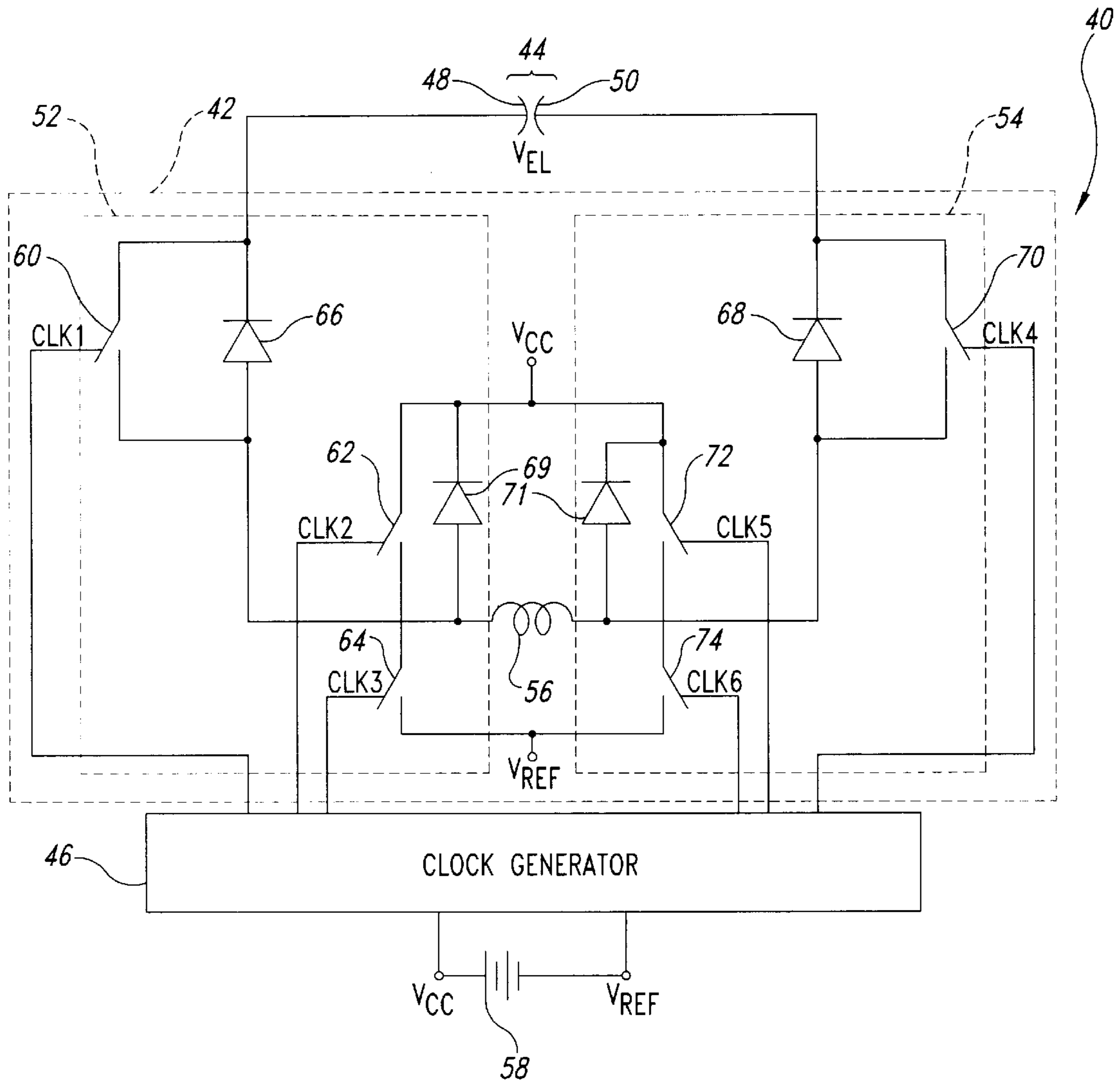


Fig. 1

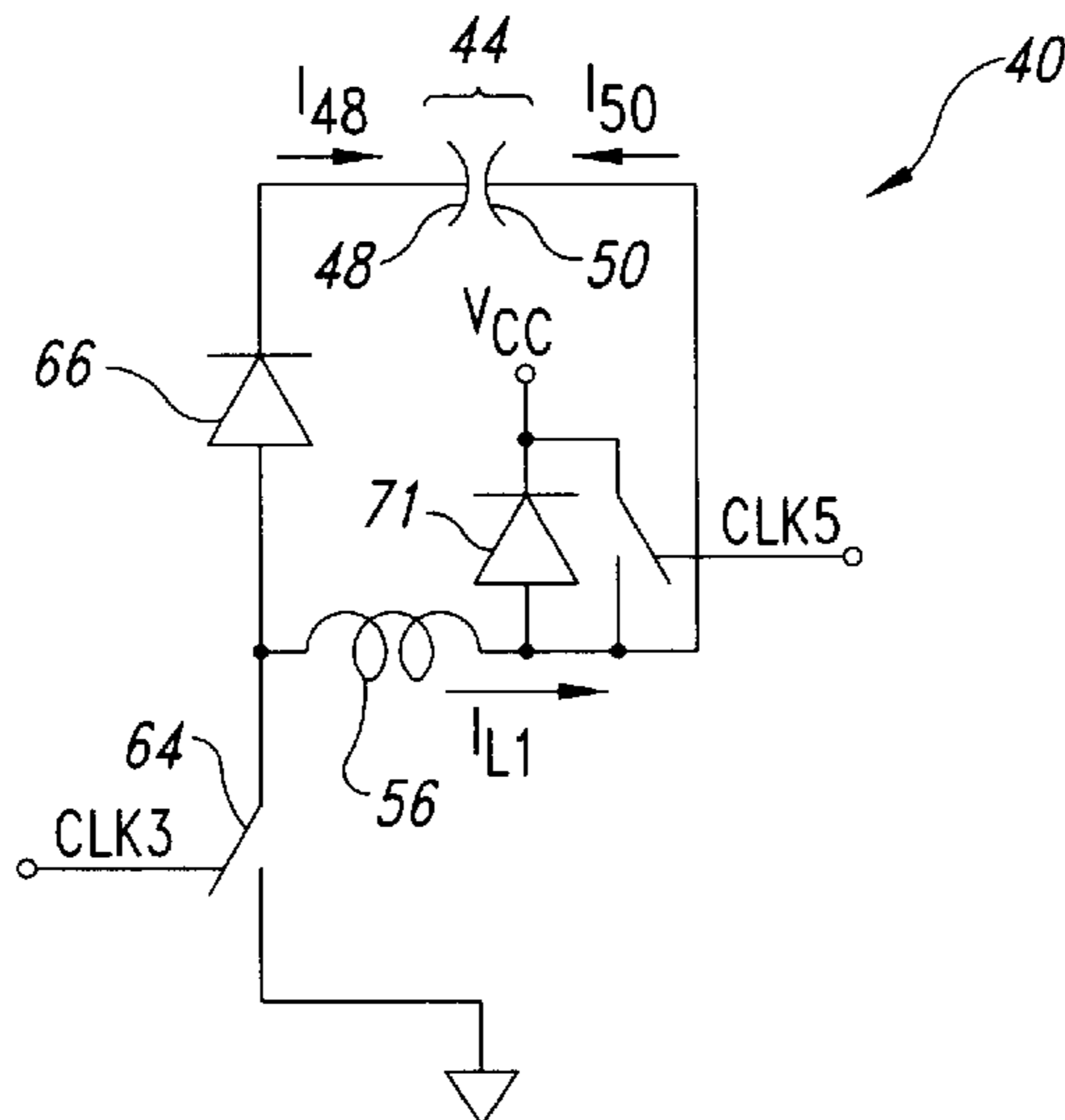


Fig. 3

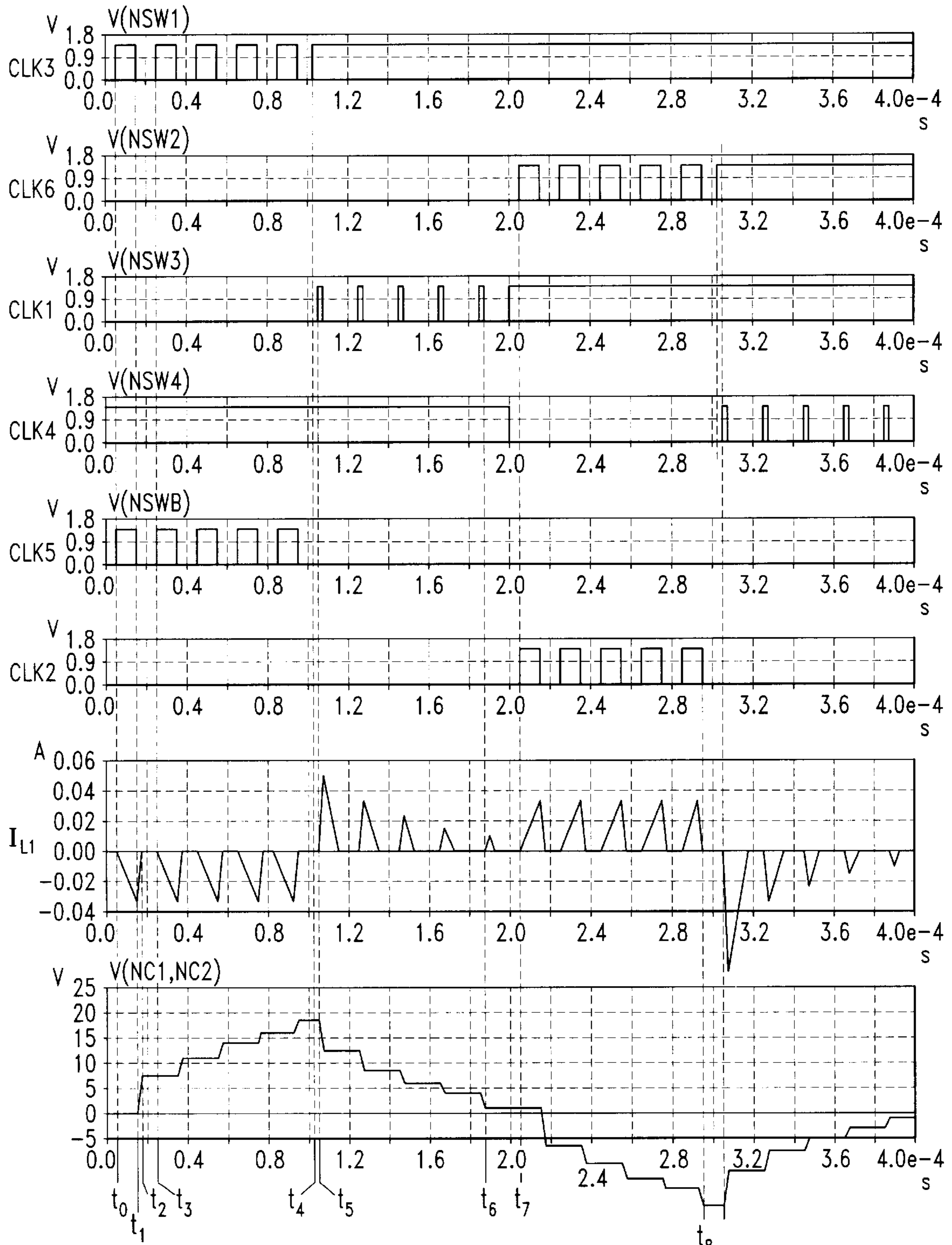


Fig. 2

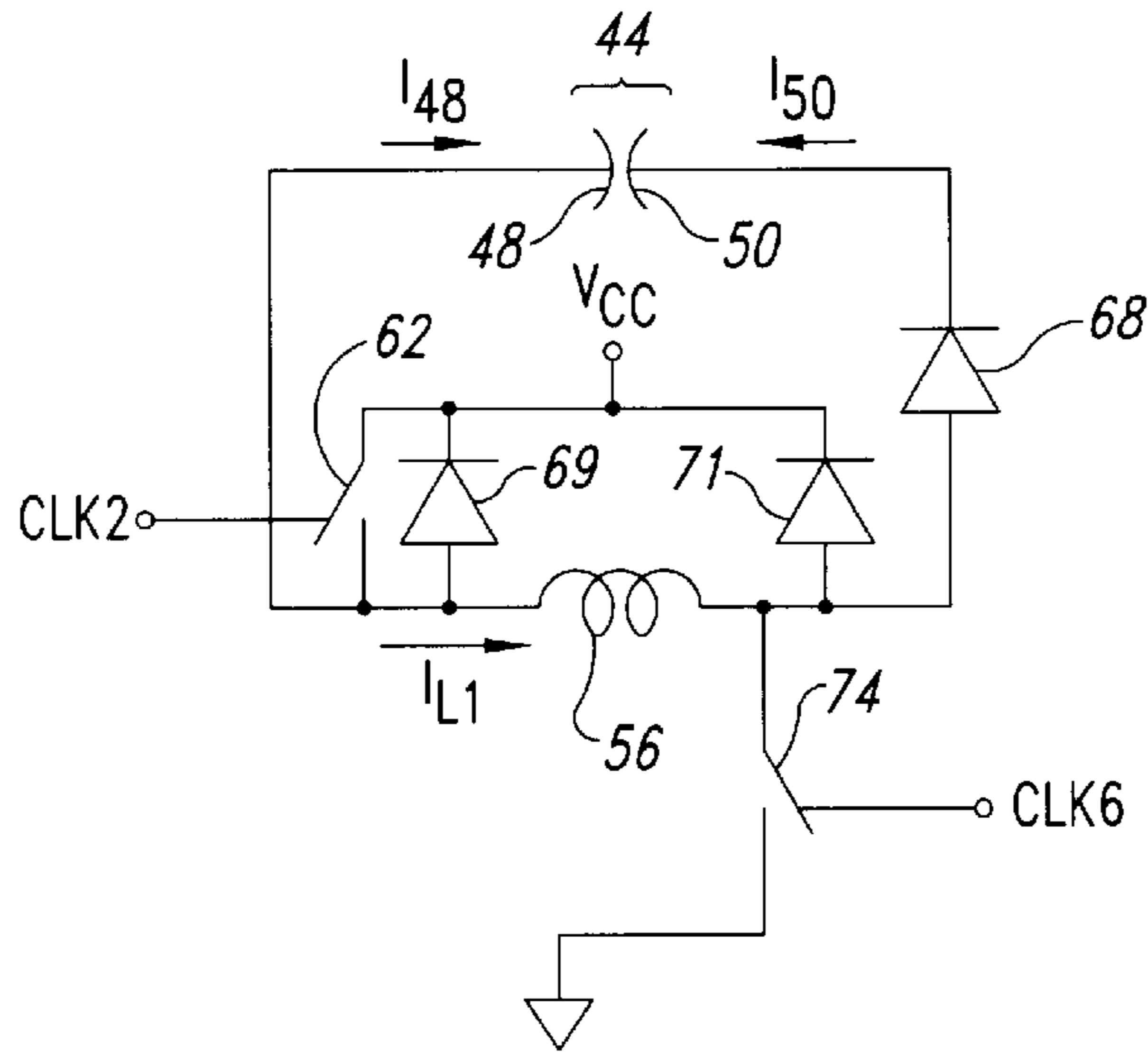


Fig. 4

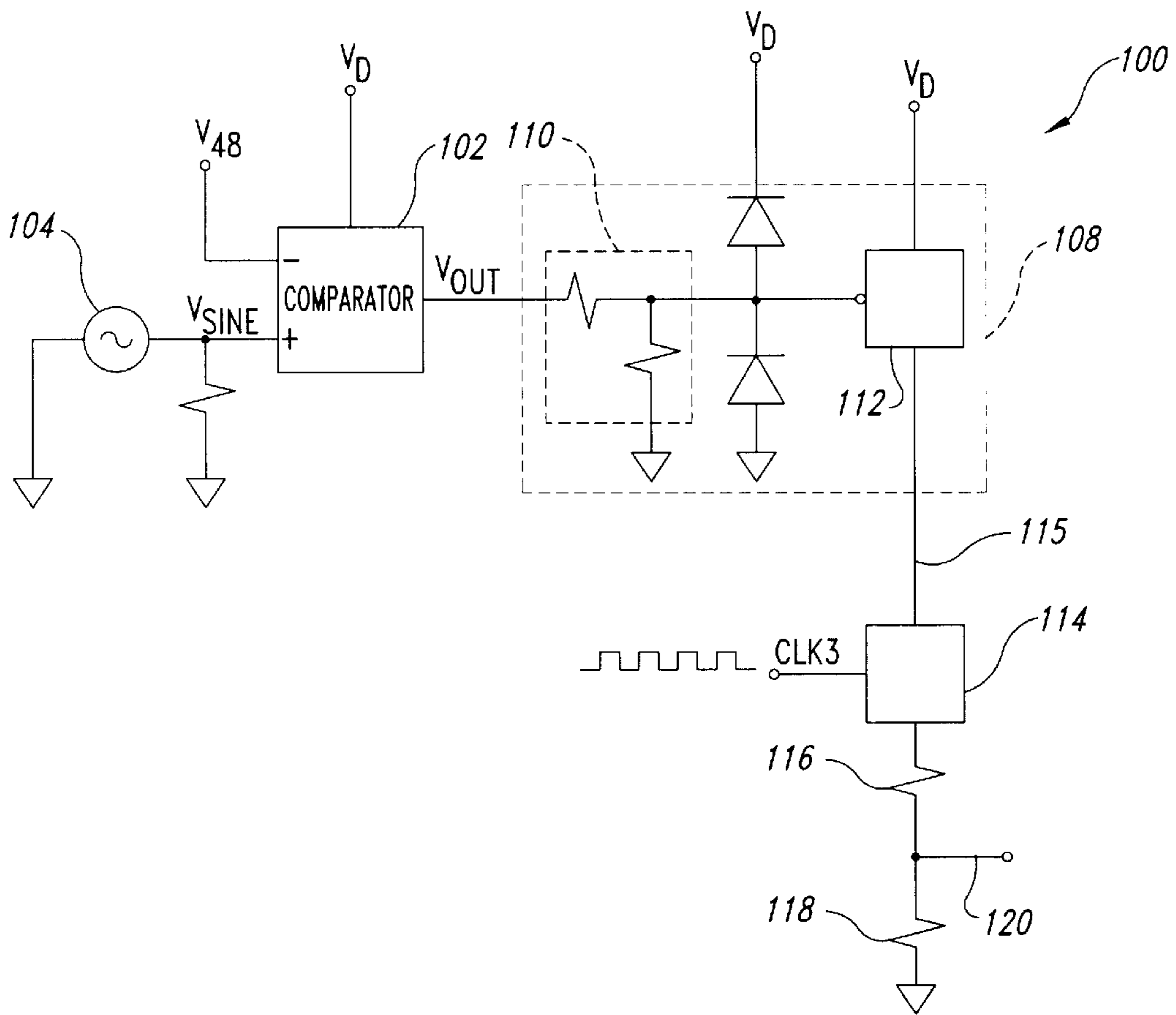


Fig. 5

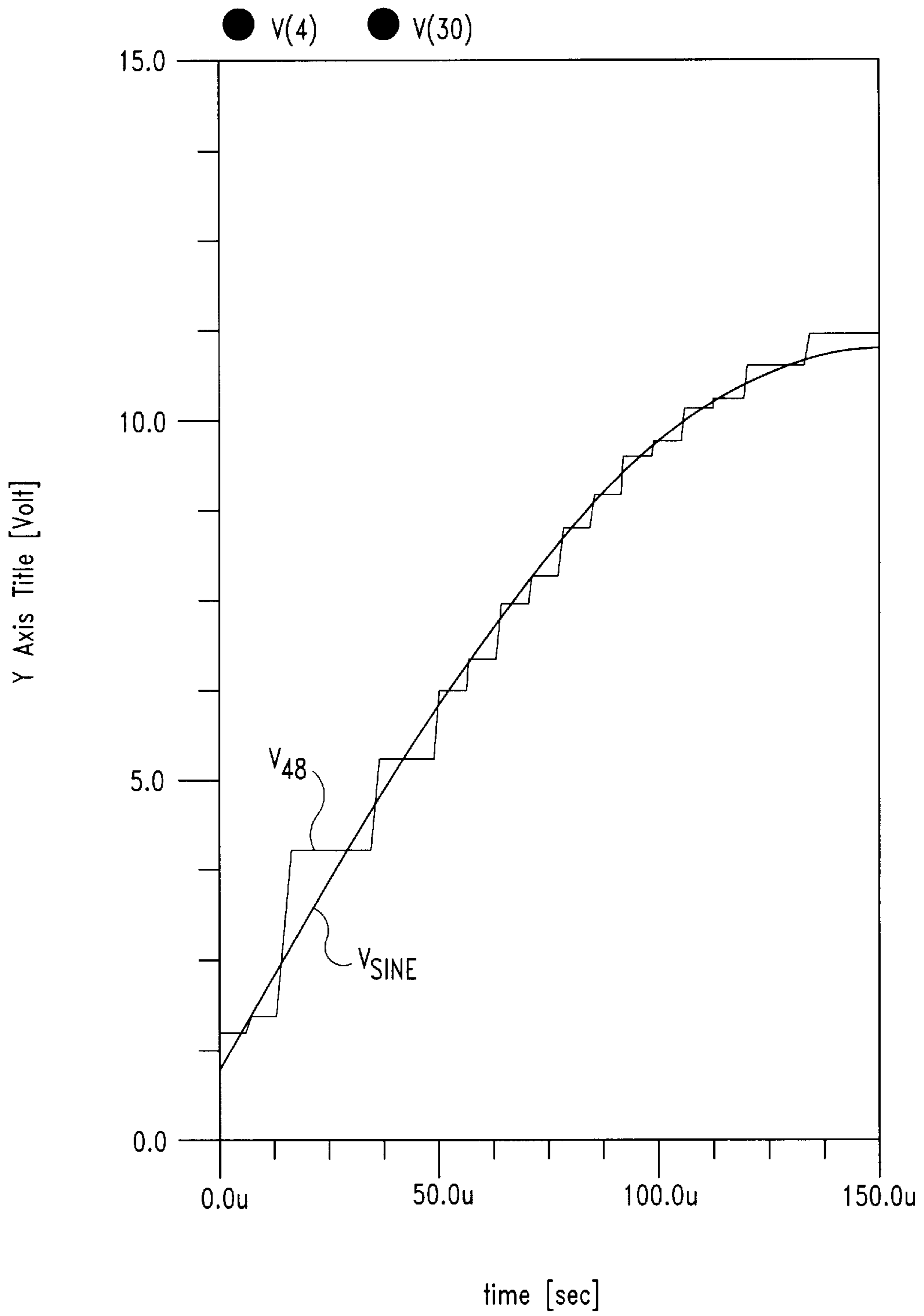


Fig. 6

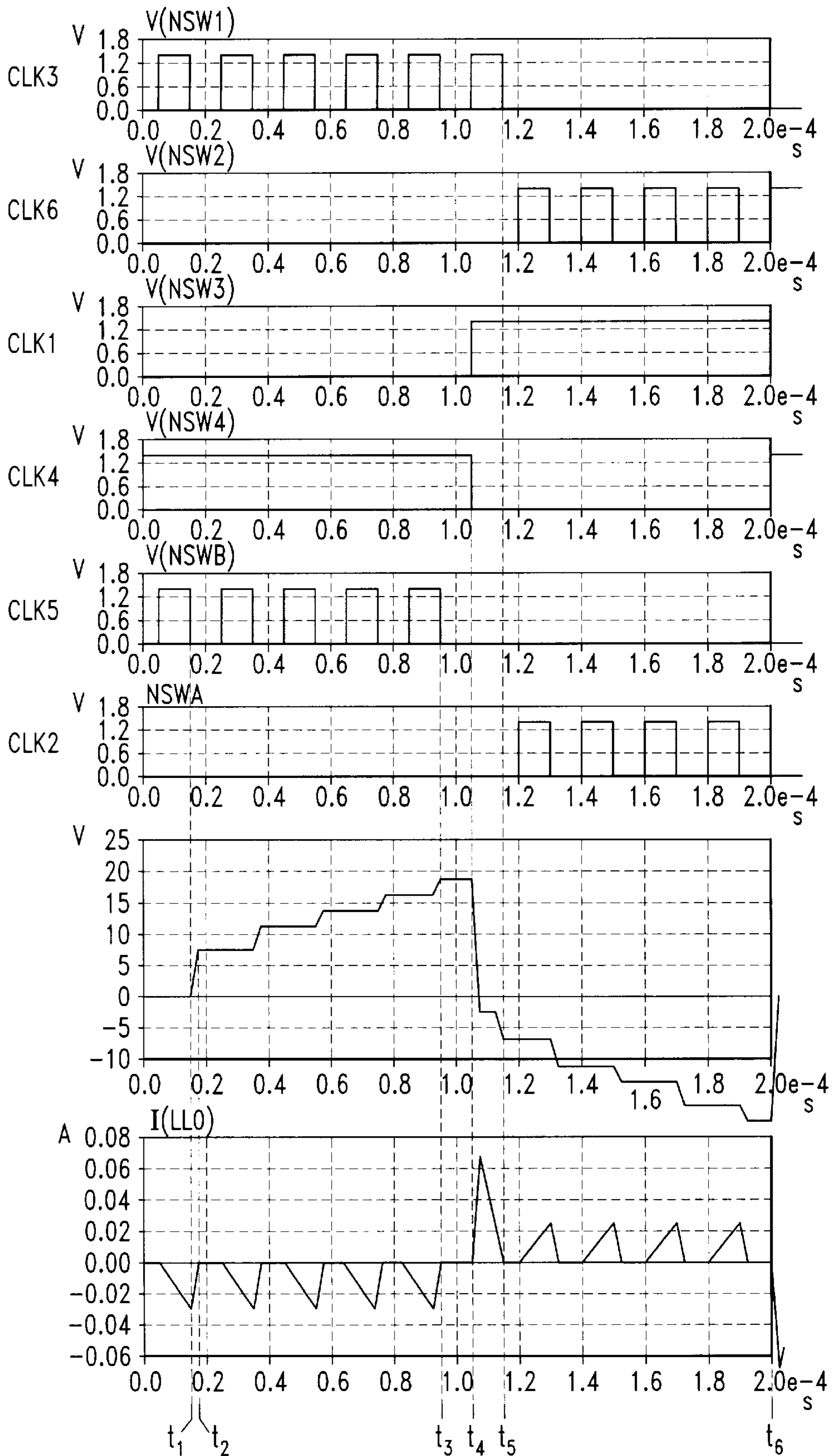


Fig. 7

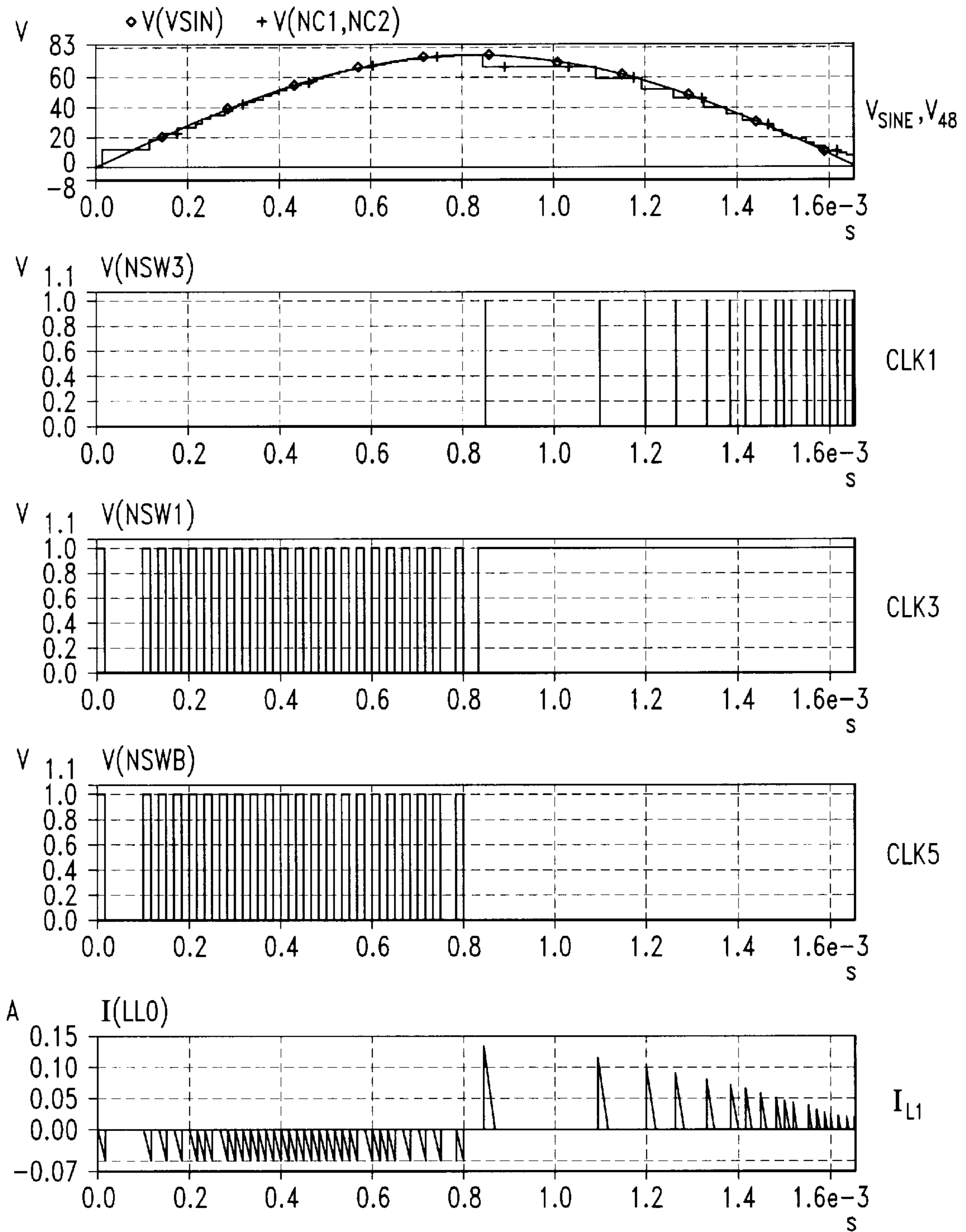


Fig. 8

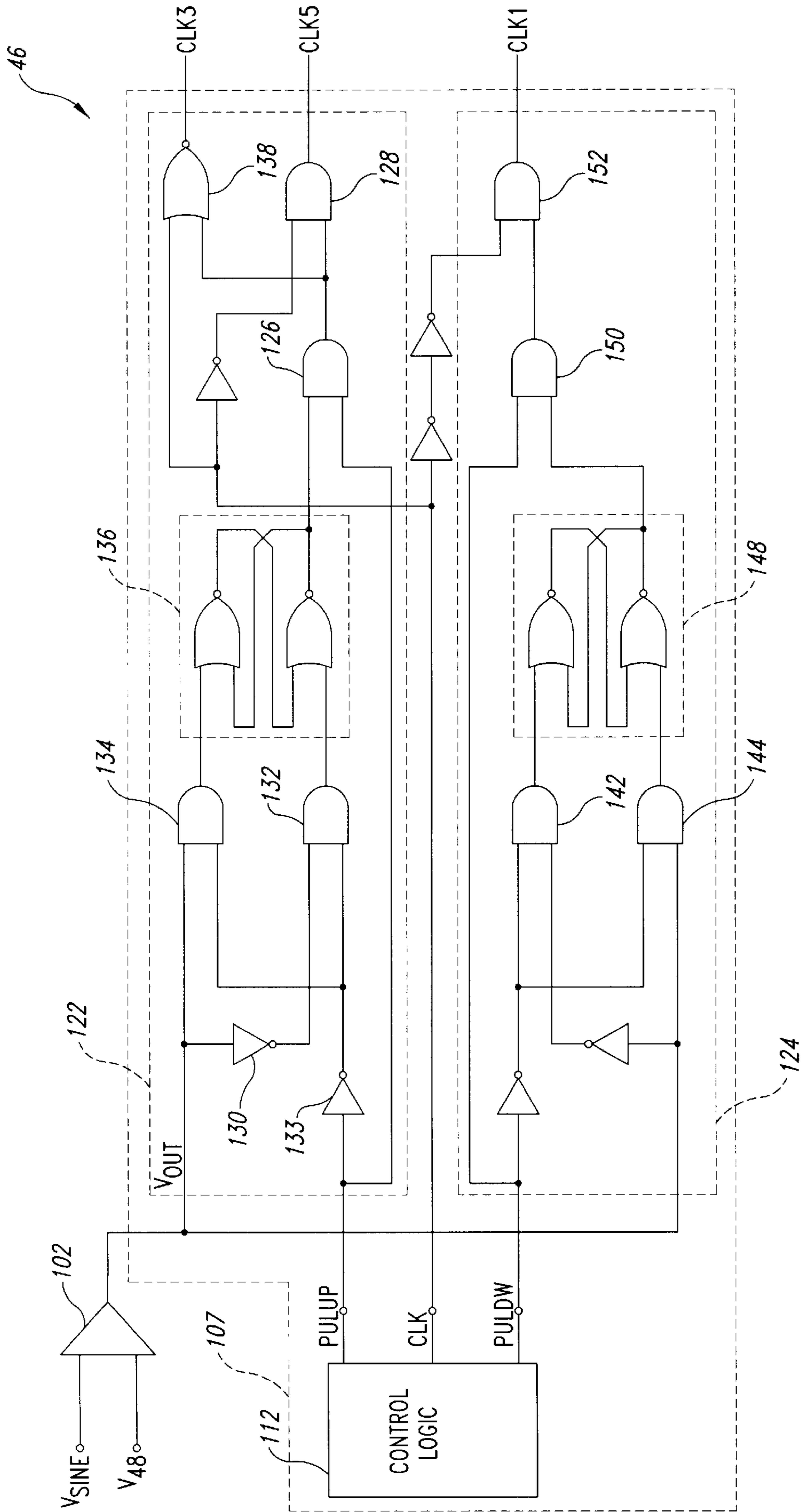


Fig. 9

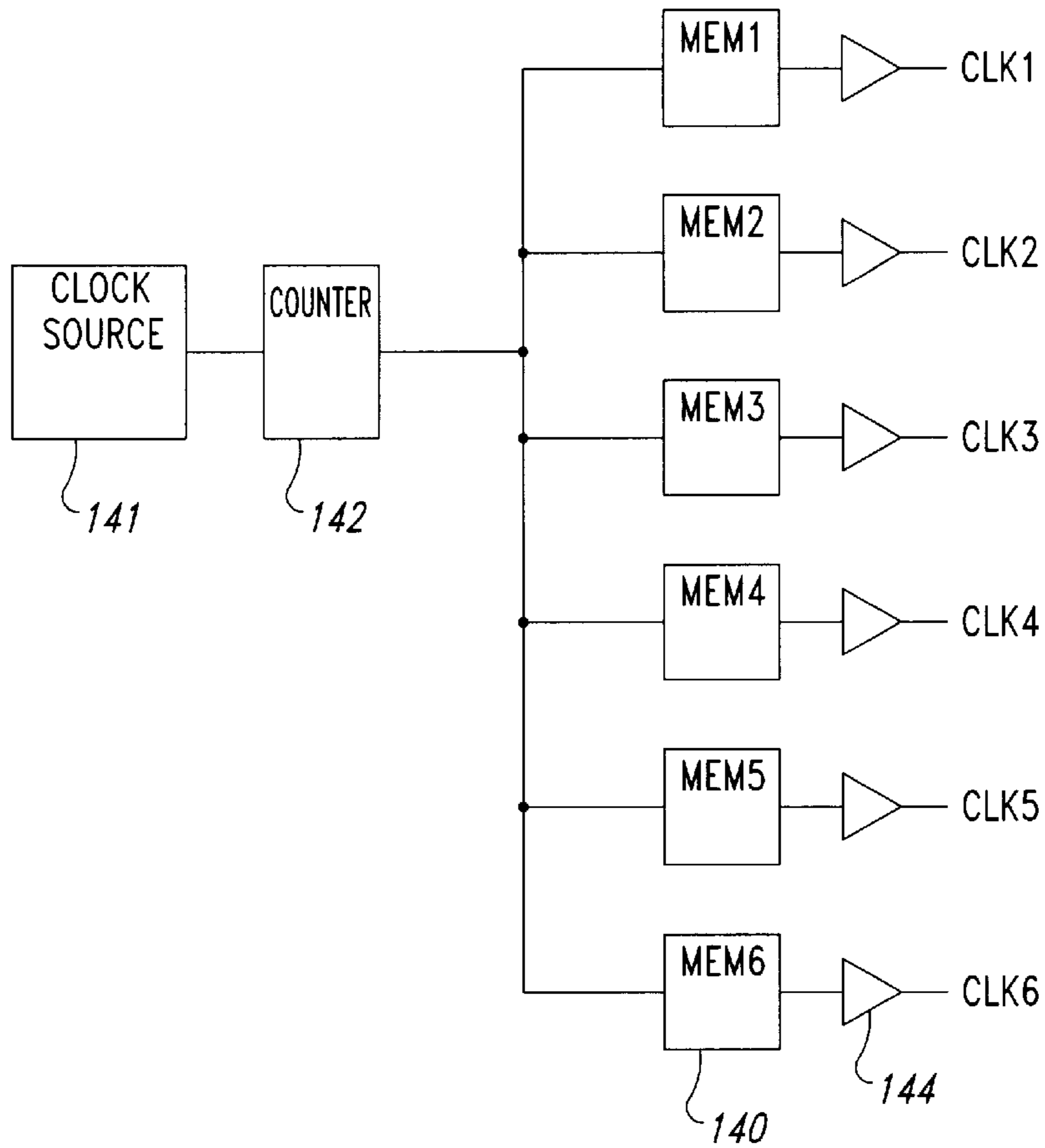


Fig. 10

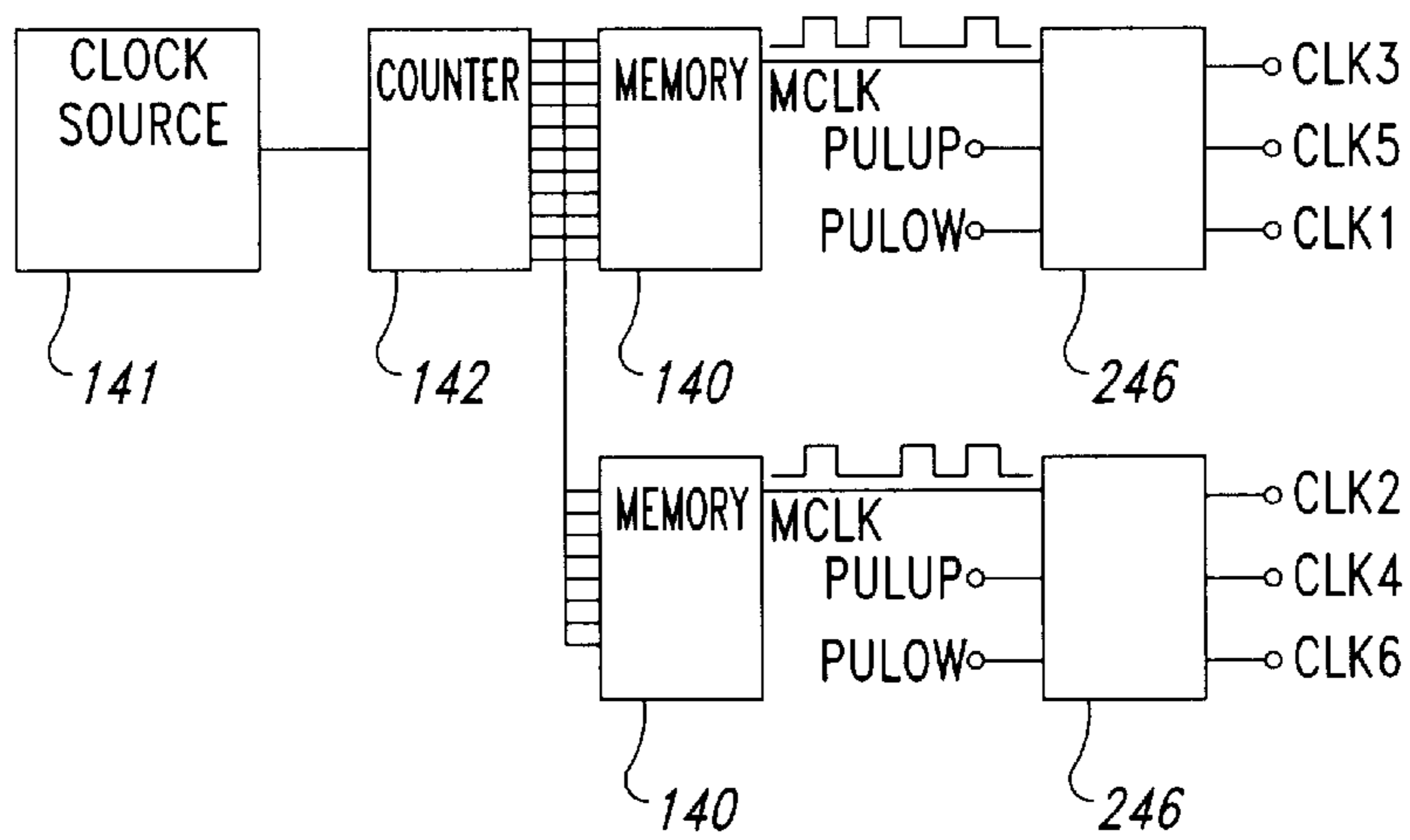


Fig. 11

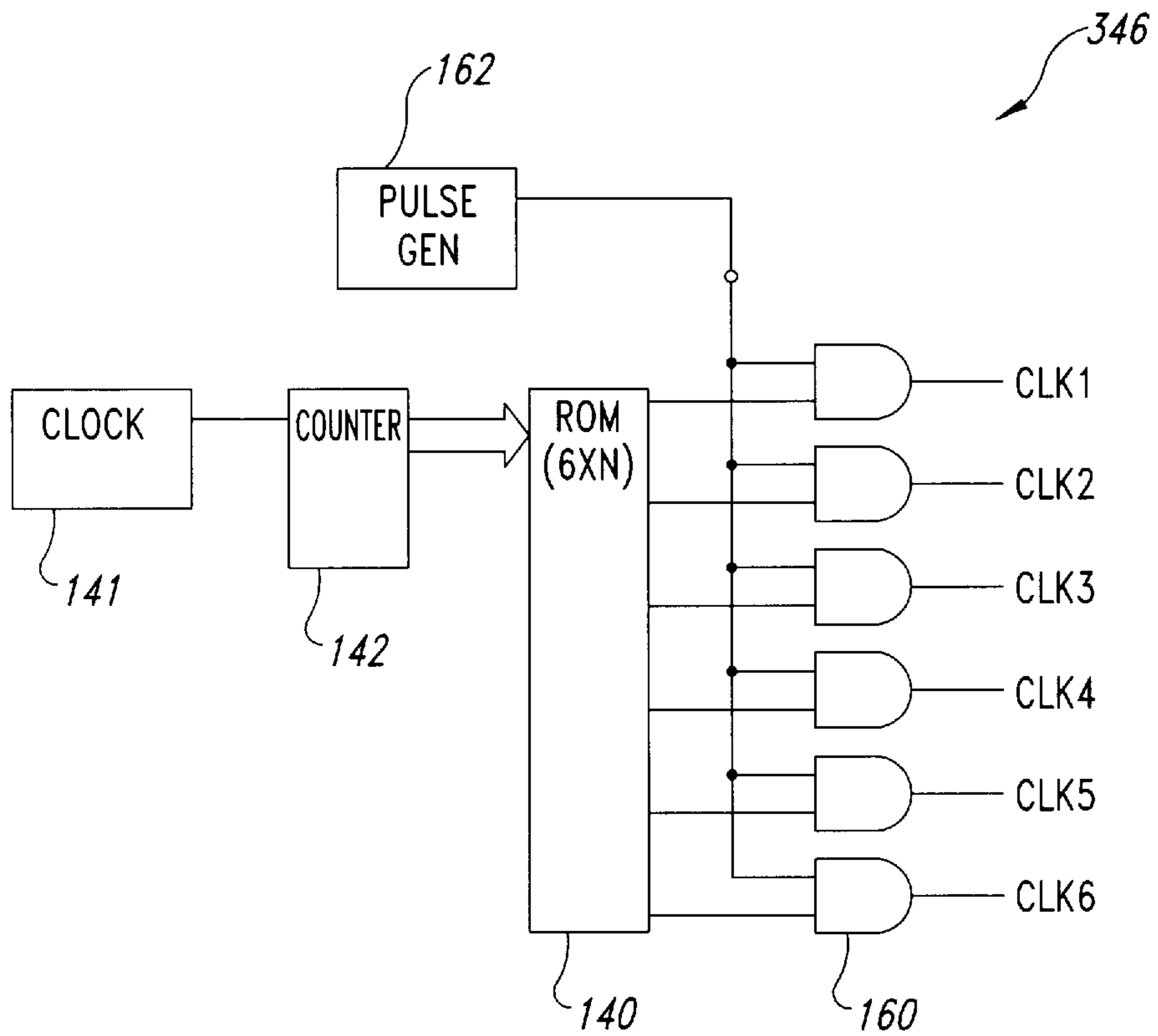


Fig. 12

ELECTROLUMINESCENT LAMP DRIVER CIRCUIT WITH SIGNAL TRACKING

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to electroluminescent devices and, more particularly, to driver circuits for electroluminescent devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Electroluminescent devices are used in a variety of low power applications. For example, many battery-operated devices, such as wrist watches, utilize electroluminescent illuminators to illuminate their displays. In such devices, energy for activating the electroluminescent lamp typically is provided by a battery at a voltage range of 1–9 V. However, for proper operation, electroluminescent lamps operate at much higher voltages, on the order of 50–300 V. Thus, typical battery output voltages are inadequate for directly driving electroluminescent lamps.

Another limitation of battery sources is that batteries supply DC voltages, while electroluminescent displays typically emit light responsive to AC voltages. To improve the lifetime of the lamp and for acceptable performance, the driving voltage for the electroluminescent lamp preferably approximates a sine wave.

A variety of circuit structures have been suggested for driving electroluminescent lamps using batteries as power sources. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,349,269 to Kimball employs two inverters that each supply high frequency pulses to a lamp. To improve the efficiency of the lamp, each of the inverters drives an opposite terminal of the lamp so that the overall voltage change across the lamp is twice the voltage of pulses from each of the inverters. Unfortunately, the use of two inverters increases the cost and difficulty of fabrication of the driving circuit, in part because each of the inverters requires a separate inductor.

In another approach described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,527,096 to Kindlmann, a single inductor is used to drive opposite sides of an electroluminescent lamp through a switching network. The inductor drives a first side of the electroluminescent lamp while the second side of the lamp is coupled to ground. The inductor injects current to the first side of the lamp thereby charging the lamp to high voltage. Then, the lamp is discharged by coupling the first side to ground.

The switching network then couples the inductor to the second side and the inductor charges the second side. The second side is then grounded, once again discharging the lamp. The resulting waveform across the electroluminescent lamp is a sawtooth wave having positive and negative peaks. The sawtooth waveform deviates substantially from the preferred sinusoidal waveform and produces a rapid discharge of the electroluminescent lamp at a relatively high current. This rapid discharge can cause premature failure of the lamp and typically does not provide optimum current draw or efficiency.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An electroluminescent driver circuit includes a switching circuit that has a first set of switches which selectively couple an inductor between a supply voltage and reference voltage in either of two directions. The voltages thus induce current in either of two directions through the inductor, thereby storing energy in the inductor.

A second set of switches then couple the inductor across an electroluminescent lamp simultaneously with the first set

of switches isolating the inductor from the supply or reference voltage. When the inductor is isolated from the supply or reference voltage, the stored energy in the inductor produces current flow into the lamp, thereby incrementally charging the lamp. Because the inductor current can be induced in either of two directions, the driver circuit can charge the lamp either positively or negatively.

In one embodiment, a comparator driven by a sinusoidal signal produces clocking signals that control the lamps. The comparator compares the lamp voltage to the sinusoidal signal and adjusts the clocking signals in response. By reducing errors between the lamp voltage and the sinusoidal voltage, the comparator ensures that the lamp is driven by a substantially sinusoidal voltage.

In this embodiment, the switches are configured such that the inductor current can incrementally discharge the electroluminescent lamp as well as incrementally charge the lamp. The driving circuit can sequentially charge and discharge the lamp to produce a substantially sinusoidal voltage across the electroluminescent lamp.

In one embodiment, each end of the inductor is coupled to a respective end of the electroluminescent lamp through a respective unidirectional circuit formed from a parallel combination of a diode and a switch. While a switch is open, its respective diode allows the electroluminescent lamp to be charged by current from the inductor during an interval when energy is being stored in the inductor. The diode and open switch then block current flow out of the lamp to prevent unintended discharging.

Selected switches can then be closed to allow the capacitor to be discharged, either incrementally through the inductor as described above, directly to ground through one of the switches in the first set or through the battery. Because the electroluminescent lamp can be quickly discharged to ground or can be controllably discharged by pulses from the inductor, the electroluminescent lamp can be driven with either a sawtooth type of waveform or with a substantially sinusoidal waveform.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic of a driving circuit coupled to an electroluminescent device, according to one embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a signal timing diagram of various signals within the driver circuit of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is an equivalent circuit of the driving circuit of FIG. 1 during charging of a first plate of the electroluminescent lamp.

FIG. 4 is an equivalent circuit of the driving circuit of FIG. 1 during charging of a second plate of the electroluminescent lamp.

FIG. 5 is a clock generator circuit for producing clock signals to control the driving circuit of FIG. 1.

FIG. 6 is a signal timing diagram showing the lamp voltage tracking a reference sinusoidal voltage.

FIG. 7 is a signal timing diagram of various signals within the driver circuit of FIG. 1 for an alternative method of driving the lamp with a sawtooth wave.

FIG. 8 is a signal timing diagram of various signals within the driver circuit of FIG. 1 where pulses are spaced unevenly.

FIG. 9 is a circuit schematic of a clock signal generating circuit for use with the driver circuit of FIG. 1.

FIG. 10 is a circuit schematic of a first alternative clock signal source for use with the driver circuit of FIG. 1.

FIG. 11 is a circuit schematic of a second alternative clock signal source for use with the driver circuit of FIG. 1.

FIG. 12 is a circuit schematic of a third alternative clock signal source for use with the driver circuit of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

As shown in FIG. 1, an electroluminescent display 40 includes a driver circuit 42 that drives a lamp 44 in response to clock signals CLK1–CLK6 from a clock generator 46. The lamp 44 is a conventional electroluminescent lamp formed from first and second plates, 48, 50, separated by an electroluminescent material. As is known, electroluminescent lamps are largely capacitive and the lamp 44 is therefore represented in the schematic of FIG. 1 by a capacitor symbol. The driver circuit 42 and clock generator 46 receive power from a battery 58 that outputs a DC voltage V_{CC} on the order of 1–9 V. The battery 58 is preferably a commercially available rechargeable battery.

The driver circuit 42 is formed from a left leg 52 and a right leg 54 linked by an inductor 56 and the lamp 44. Each of the legs 52, 54 includes three electronic switches 60, 62, 64, 70, 72, and 74 that open and close responsive to respective clock signals CLK1–CLK6 to provide driver currents I_{48} , I_{50} to the first or second plate 48, 50, as will be described in greater detail below. The switches 60, 62, 64, 70, 72, and 74 are preferably formed from NMOS transistors so that the switches 60, 62, 64, 70, 72, and 74 are OFF when their respective clock signals CLK1–CLK6 are low. Additionally, diodes 66, 68, 69, 71 are coupled in parallel with the switches 60, 62, 70, 72 to provide unidirectional current paths between the inductor 56 and the respective plates 48, 50 and before the inductor 56 and the battery 58.

Charging and discharging of the lamp 44 will now be described with reference to the timing diagram of FIG. 2. In the following discussion, it will be assumed for clarity of presentation that each of the clock signals CLK1–CLK6 has transitions at regular intervals. As will be described below with reference to FIGS. 5 and 6, the actual intervals between transitions will vary to allow the lamp voltage to more closely approximate a sinusoid.

At time t_0 the clock signals CLK1, CLK2, CLK6 are low, thereby turning OFF their respective switches 60, 62, 74. Also, at time t_0 the clock signals CLK3–CLK5 transition high, thereby turning ON their respective switches 70, 62, 64. As will be described below, the third and fifth clock signals CLK3, CLK5 do not remain continuously high. Therefore, at time t_0 , the electroluminescent lamp 40 can be modeled with the equivalent circuit of FIG. 3, and current I_{L1} begins to flow through the inductor 56 as shown in the seventh graph of FIG. 2. Because the current I_{L1} is flowing from right to left, the current I_{L1} is shown as negative in this interval.

As is known, the inductor 56 will store energy in response to the inductor current I_{L1} , where the total energy stored in the inductor will be:

$$E_I = \frac{1}{2} L I_{PK}^2,$$

where I_{PK} is the peak of the inductor current I_{L1} at time t_1 .

At time t_1 , the third and fifth clock signals CLK3, CLK5 pulse low briefly, thereby opening the switches 64, 72 so that the inductor 56 and lamp 44 are connected in an isolated loop. Because the current through an inductor will not change instantly, the inductor current I_{L1} continues the flow. However, because there is no path between the inductor 56

and the reference potential V_{REF} , the inductor current I_{L1} is forced through the diode 66 as the left leg current I_{48} . The left leg current I_{48} charges the left plate 48, thereby increasing the voltage of the left plate 48 incrementally as shown in the eighth graph of FIG. 2.

As the inductor current I_{L1} flows into the left plate 48, energy stored in the inductor 56 is transferred to the lamp 44 and the inductor current I_{L1} falls until time t_2 . After time t_2 , the inductor current I_{L1} does not become negative because the diode 66 blocks the left leg current I_{48} from flowing to the inductor 56. The diode 66 thus prevents the left plate 48 from discharging and the increased voltage on the left plate 48 is retained.

At time t_3 , the low-going pulses of the third and fifth clock signals CLK3, CLK5 end and the switches 64, 72 once again turn ON, thereby providing a path from the supply voltage V_{CC} through the inductor 56 to the reference potential V_{REF} . The inductor current I_{L1} begins to flow, thereby storing energy in the inductor 56 once again. Between times t_3 and t_4 , several pulses of the third and fifth clock signals CLK3 and CLK5 arrive, each time increasing the lamp voltage incrementally. Assuming all of the energy stored in the inductor 56 is transferred to the lamp 44 in response to each pulse, the change in voltage across the lamp 44 can be determined by the relationship:

$$\Delta E_C = E_I \frac{1}{2} C \Delta V^2.$$

As shown in the lowermost graph of FIG. 2, the voltage on the left plate 48 rises slightly in response to each of the pulses until the voltage across the lamp 44 is approximately 75 V at time t_4 .

At time t_4 , the pulses of the clock signals CLK3, CLK5 terminate with the third clock signal CLK3 remaining high and the fifth clock signal CLK5 remaining low. Therefore, the switch 72 remains OFF and the switch 64 remains ON. The lamp 44 remains charged because neither the diode 66 nor the switch 60 will pass current.

Rather than discharging the lamp 44 quickly, the driving circuit 42 incrementally discharges the left plate 48 to more closely approximate a sine wave. To discharge the left plate 48 in a controlled fashion, the first clock signal CLK1 is pulsed quickly to open and close the switch 60. Each time the switch 60 closes, the voltage across the lamp 44 causes current to flow through the switches 60, 70, inductor 56 and diode 68. In response to each pulse of current, the voltage of the left plate 48 decreases incrementally until time t_6 .

At time t_6 , when the voltage across the lamp 44 has reached approximately 0 V, the first clock signal CLK1 remains high so that the switch 60 remains ON. The driving circuit 40 can thus be represented by the equivalent circuit of FIG. 4 after time t_6 and the driving circuit 42 is configured to charge the right plate 50.

Advantageously, the diode 71 provides an alternative path for current from the inductor 56 to charge the battery 58 as will now be described. As described above, when the pulse of the first clock signal CLK1 arrives at time t_5 , current flows through the inductor 56, thereby storing energy in the inductor 56. Slightly after time t_5 , when pulse returns low, the switch 60 opens, terminating the loop that included the switch 60, the inductor 56, the diode 68 and the lamp 44. The inductor current I_{L1} continues to flow through the only available current path which includes the diode 71, the battery 58, and the switch 64. By forcing current to flow through the battery 58 the inductor 56 transfers a portion of its stored energy back into the battery 58, thereby recharging the battery.

At time t_7 , a sequence of pulses of the second and sixth clock signals CLK2, CLK6 begins. The pulsed signals

CLK2, CLK6 turn the switches 62, 74 ON and OFF. In response to each set of pulses, the right plate 50 is charged by a current I_{50} through the diode 68 in the same manner described above with respect to FIG. 3, until the voltage across the lamp 44 is approximately -75 V at about time t_8 . After time t_8 , the sixth clock signal CLK6 stays high holding ON the switch 74 and the second clock signal CLK2 stays low holding OFF the switch 62. Next, the fourth clock signal CLK4 is pulsed to incrementally discharge the right plate 50 in the same fashion described above, until the voltage across the lamp 44 is approximately 0 V. As can be seen from the lowermost diagram of FIG. 2, the voltage across the lamp 44 varies between $+75$ V and -75 V in a very rough approximation of a sine wave. As above, responsive to each pulse of the fourth clock signal CLK4, a portion of the energy from the lamp 44 is stored in the inductor 56. The stored energy is then transferred to the battery 58 through the diode 69 and switch 74.

FIG. 5 shows one embodiment of a control circuit 100 that monitors the voltage across the lamp 44 and adjusts clocking signals CLK1–CLK6 so that the lamp voltage more closely approximates a sine wave. The control circuit 100 includes as its central element a comparator 102 that receives a reference sinusoidal voltage V_{SINE} from a conventional reference source 104. The second input of the comparator 102 is coupled to the left plate 48 so that the comparator 102 continuously compares the voltage V_{48} of the left plate 48 to the reference sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} . The comparator 102 has a high gain, on the order of 100, so that the comparator output V_{OUT} is high when the reference sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} is greater than the left plate voltage V_{48} . Similarly, the output of the comparator 102 is low whenever the voltage of the left plate V_{48} is greater than the sinusoidal voltage V_{SINE} . Thus, the comparator 102 outputs either a high or low voltage indicating whether the left plate voltage V_{48} is greater than or less than the sinusoidal voltage V_{SINE} .

The output of the comparator drives a gating circuit 108 formed from a resistor divider 110 and a switch 112. At its input, the switch 112 receives the supply voltage V_D at its input and, at its control terminal, the switch 112 receives a scaled version of the output voltage V_{OUT} from the resistor divider 110. When the comparator output V_{OUT} is high, the switch 112 turns ON, thereby coupling the supply voltage V_{CC} to a node 115. The node 115 thus receives the supply voltage V_{CC} when the plate voltage V_{48} is less than the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} .

The node 115 forms an input of a gating switch 114 controlled by the clock signal CLK3. The output of the gating switch 114 is then coupled to ground through a pair of resistors 116, 118. When the output of the comparator 102 is high, the voltage at the output terminal 120 will mirror the clock signal CLK3. Thus, when the voltage of the left plate V_{48} falls below the sinusoidal voltage V_{SINE} , the control circuit 100 provides pulses substantially synchronized to the third clock signal CLK3 that activate the first switch 64. As described above, the pulses input to the first switch 64 incrementally charge the left plate 48, thereby increasing the left plate voltage V_{48} . As shown in the graph of FIG. 6, the control circuit causes the voltage of the left plate to rise incrementally while substantially tracking the sinusoidal voltage V_{SINE} .

To track the sinusoidal voltage during discharging (i.e., between times t_4 and t_6 in FIG. 2), the input to the control switch 104 is set high, the second, fifth and sixth clock signals CLK2, CLK6 are set low, and the third and fourth clock signals CLK3, CLK4 are set high. The lamp 44 and inductor 56 thus form a loop controlled by the switch 60.

The fifth clock signal CLK5 is set high to provide a reference to ground through the switch 72 and the battery 58.

The switch 60 is controlled by an inverse of the output of the comparator 102 rather than by the third clock signal CLK3 of FIG. 2. As the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} falls, the left plate voltage V_{48} becomes greater than the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} . The comparator output V_{OUT} transitions low in response and the invert comparator output transitions high, thereby turning ON the switch 60. The closed switch 60 lows current to flow from the left plate 48 through the inductor 56 to the right plate 50, thereby lowering the lamp voltage V_{EL} and the voltage of the left plate 48. As the left plate 48 discharges, the left plate voltage V_{48} falls below the sinusoidal signal, thereby causing the comparator output to transition high. The inverted version of the comparator output turns OFF the switch 60, ending discharge of the left plate 48 until the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} once again falls below the left plate voltage V_{48} . The continuous adjustment of the left plate voltage V_{48} allows the lamp voltage V_{EL} to track the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} closely.

One skilled in the art will recognize that the left plate voltage V_{48} may be smoothed through conventional filtering techniques and by selecting the appropriate inductance and capacitance of the inductor 56 and lamp 44 to provide an appropriate resonant frequency for the driving circuit 42. Also, one skilled in the art will recognize that a substantially identical control circuit to the control circuit 100 of FIG. 5 (with appropriately reversed polarities) can be used to ensure that the negative portion of the lamp voltage V_{EL} is also substantially sinusoidal. Also, through an appropriate switching structure, the same control circuit 100 can be used to drive the right plate 58 in the same fashion as the left plate 48. In such a structure, the right plate voltage V_{50} would be increasingly positive relative to the left plate voltage V_{48} so that the lamp V_{EL} voltage as described above would be negative.

Although the driving circuit 42 can produce an approximate sinusoidal waveform for driving the lamp 44 when driven by the circuitry of FIG. 5, the driving circuit 42 can also produce a sawtooth or alternating sawtooth waveform, as will now be described with reference to the signal timing diagram of FIG. 7. As shown in the first through sixth graphs of FIG. 7, the clock signals CLK1–CLK6 for producing a sawtooth waveform are identical to those of FIG. 2 for the period from t_0 to t_3 . Then, at time t_4 , the first clock signal CLK1 and the third clock signal CLK3 both transition high. The switches 60, 64 are thus both ON, forming a direct path between the left plate 48 and ground. Consequently, the left plate quickly discharges to ground, thereby reducing the voltage across the lamp 44 to approximately 0 V.

At time t_5 , the third clock signal CLK3 transitions low, thereby turning OFF the switches 64, 70. Briefly thereafter, at time t_5 , the fourth clock signal CLK4 transitions low, so that the driving circuit 42 can be represented by the equivalent circuit of FIG. 4 once again. The right plate 50 is then charged to approximately 75 V by pulsing the second and sixth clock signals CLK2, CLK6 until the voltage equals 75 V at time t_5 . Then, at time t_5 , the fourth and sixth clock signals CLK4, CLK6 both transition high, thereby providing a direct path between the right plate 50 and ground. The direct path quickly discharges the right plate 50 so that the voltage across the lamp 44 once again returns to 0 V. The overall waveform defined by the lamp voltage V_{EL} is thus a bi-directional sawtooth wave.

One skilled in the art will recognize that, rather than providing the input signal shown between times t_4 and t_6 in FIG. 5, the signals between times t_0 and t_3 can merely be

repeated to produce a single-ended sawtooth wave. Thus, the driving circuit 42 of FIG. 1 can be used to produce an approximately sinusoidal wave, a single-ended sawtooth wave, or a double-ended sawtooth wave.

To further improve tracking of the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} (or any other desired waveform), pulses of the clocking signal CLK1–CLK4 may be unevenly spaced as can be seen in the timing diagrams of FIG. 8. One approach to producing such signals is shown in the clock generating circuit 46 of FIG. 9. As with the circuit of FIG. 5, the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} and the left plate voltage V_{48} are input to the comparator 102 to produce the signal V_{OUT} . However, in the embodiment of FIG. 9, the gating circuit 108 is replaced with a clock circuit 107, formed from two separate legs 122, 124 and a logic control circuit 112. The upper leg 122 produces the third and fifth clocking signals CLK3, CLK5, while the lower leg 124 produces the first clocking signal CLK1. The legs 122, 124 both receive the output signal V_{OUT} from the comparator 102 and a master clock CLK from the logic control circuit 112. In addition, the upper leg 122 receives an up-enable signal PULUP and the lower leg 124 receives a down-enable signal PULDW from the logic control circuit 112 to enable the fifth and first clock signals CLK5, CLK1, respectively. The logic control circuit 112 may be of a conventional type such as an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC).

Considering first the upper leg 122, when the up-enable signal PULUP is low, a control AND gate 126 outputs a “0” that drives an output AND gate 128. In response, the output AND gate 128 outputs a low signal as the fifth clock signal CLK5. Thus, when the up-enable signal PULUP is low, the fifth clock signal CLK5 is low, thereby holding the switch 72 (FIG. 2) is OFF. Similarly, when the down-enable signal PULDW is low, the first clock signal CLK1 is low as will be described below, thereby turning OFF the switch 62 to block current flow into the left plate 48. When one of the up-enable or down-enable signals PULUP, PULDW is high, the respective leg 122, 124 is enabled and the clock signals CLK1 or CLK3, CLK5, are controlled by the relative magnitude of the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} and the left plate voltage V_{48} .

Returning to the upper leg 122, if the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} is higher than the left plate voltage V_{48} , the output signal V_{OUT} will be high. The high output signal V_{OUT} is inverted by an inverter 130 so that an input AND gate 132 receives a low signal at one input. The remaining input of the AND gate 132 receives an inverted version of the up enable signal PULUP from an inverter 133. The low input signals force the output of the AND gate 132 low.

At the same time, an input AND gate 134 outputs a high signal in response to the high inverted up-enable signal PULUP and the high output signal V_{OUT} . The outputs of the AND gates 132, 134 drive a latch 136 that outputs a high signal to the control AND gate 126 in response. Because the up-enable signal PULUP drives the remaining input of the control AND gate, the output of the control AND gate 126 is high. The high output of the control AND gate 122 drives one input of an output OR gate 138 to set the third clock signal CLK3 high. At the same time, the AND gate output drives the output AND gate 128, thereby enabling the fifth clock signal CLK5. The output AND gate 128 is driven by an inverted version of the clock signal CLK so that the fifth clock signal CLK5 is an inverted version of the clock signal CLK.

Thus as can be seen in FIG. 8, the first clock signal CLK1 is low during the time that the left plate is being charged. As also shown in FIG. 8, the third and fifth clock signals

substantially follow the master clock signal CLK except when the left plate voltage V_{48} exceeds the sinusoidal signal V_{SINE} . As described above, the driving circuit 42 responds to pulses of the first, third and fifth clock signal CLK1, CLK3, CLK5 by selectively charging the left plate 48. For brevity, the description will not be repeated here.

The lower leg 124 operates in similar fashion to the upper leg 122. When the down-enable signal PULDW is low, a pair of input AND gates 142, 144 are enabled. The upper AND gate 142 thus outputs a “1” whenever the output signal V_{OUT} is low, while the lower AND gate 144 outputs a “1” whenever the output signal V_{OUT} is high. Consequently, whenever the output signal V_{OUT} is less than the left plate voltage V_{48} , a latch 148 outputs a high signal to a control AND gate 150 that receives the down-enable signal PULDW at its second input. The control AND gate 150 then outputs a “1” to an output AND gate 152 that receives the master clock CLK at its second input. The output of the output AND gate 152 forms the first clock signal CLK1 in response. Thus, the lower leg 124 activates the switch 60 whenever the master clock signal CLK is high, the down-enable signal PULDW is high and the sinusoidal voltage V_{SINE} is greater than the left plate voltage V_{48} . As discussed above, when the switch 60 is ON, the left plate is discharged through the inductor end switch 72 to ground. As noted above, when the down-enable signal PULDW is low, the outputs of the AND gates 150, 152 are both held low, so that the first clock signal CLK1 is held low.

In another embodiment of the clock circuit 107 shown in FIG. 10, the timing of the clock signals CLK1–CLK5 is determined by a set of look-up tables in respective nonvolatile memory devices 140. The memory devices 140 are commercially available devices, such as conventional programmable read-only memories. In this embodiment, the master clock signal CLK is supplied by a conventional clock source 141 and drives a conventional counter 142. In response, the counter 142 outputs an increasing or decreasing binary count that is applied to the address inputs of each of the memory devices 140. In response, the memory devices 140 output data from their respective look-up tables. The output data drive respective buffers 144 to produce the clock signals CLK1–CLK5. The look-up table data and thus the appropriate timing of the clock signals CLK1–CLK5 is determined empirically in this embodiment, although a variety of other approaches to establishing timing of the clock signals CLK1–CLK5 can be used. Moreover, one skilled in the art will recognize that implementation of such timing based upon data in a look-up table can be realized in a variety of circuits. For example, in an alternative approach, the data may be clocked serially out of the shift register in response to the master clock signal CLK.

FIG. 11 shows another embodiment of the invention where the six memory devices 140 of FIG. 10 are replaced with two memory devices 140 and two clock logic circuits 246. The clock logic circuits 246 may be realized with the clock generating circuit of FIG. 9 or with a variety of other circuit structures.

In the embodiment of FIG. 11, the clock source 140 and counter 141 sequentially address locations in the memory devices 140 as described above. In response, each of the memory device 140 outputs a sequence of data that forms the respective master clock signal CLK. The master clock signal CLK, and the up and down enable signals PULUP, PULDW drive the clock logic circuits 246 to produce the clock signals CLK1–CLK6.

FIG. 12 shows another embodiment of a clock generating circuit 346. As with the above described embodiments, the

clock generating circuit **346** is driven by the sequentially addresses locations in a $6 \times N$ nonvolatile memory device **140**.

The memory device **140** is a commercially available device that outputs data on **6** or more data lines responsive to counts from the counter **141**. Like the **6** separate memory devices **140** of FIG. **10**, the single memory device of FIG. **12** outputs **6** separate data streams, each corresponding to one of the clock signals CLK1–CLK6. Additionally, each set of output data is gated by a respective AND gate **160** that is driven by control pulses from a pulse generator **162**. By selectively enabling the respective AND gates, the control pulses control overall operation of the clock generating circuit **346** and synchronize the clock signals CLK1–CLK6.

Although the invention has been described herein by way of an exemplary embodiment, one skilled in the art will recognize that variations may be without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, the embodiments of FIGS. **5** and **9–12** can track waveforms other than sinusoidal or sawtooth. Accordingly, the invention is not limited except by the appended claims.

We claim:

1. An electroluminescent driver circuit for driving an electroluminescent lamp having first and second driving terminals, comprising:

a voltage source for providing a supply voltage relative to a reference voltage;

an inductive circuit;

a signal source having a signal output terminal, the signal source being operative to supply a reference signal at the signal output terminal;

a switching circuit having a voltage terminal coupled to the voltage source, a lamp terminal coupled to the first driving terminal for coupling to the lamp and a current supply terminal coupled to the inductive circuit, the switching circuit further including a first input terminal and responsive to a first clocking signal at the first input terminal to apply the supply voltage to the inductive circuit, the switching circuit further including a second input terminal and being responsive to a second switching signal at the second input terminal to couple the inductive circuit to the lamp terminal; and

a comparator having a first comparator input coupled to the first driving terminal and a second comparator input coupled to the signal output terminal, the comparator being responsive to provide the first clocking signal in response to the driving terminal voltage being greater than the reference voltage terminal.

2. The driver circuit of claim **1**, wherein the reference signal is a substantially sinusoidal signal.

3. The driver circuit of claim **1** wherein the switching circuit further includes a third input terminal and the switching circuit is further responsive to a third clocking signal at the third input terminal to provide a discharge path from the second driving terminal to the reference voltage.

4. The driver circuit of claim **3**, further wherein the comparator is configured to provide the third clock signal in response to the relative magnitudes of the reference voltage terminal and the driving voltage terminal.

5. A high voltage source responsive to a set of clocking signals and an input supply voltage to produce a periodic signal having a peak voltage greater than the supply voltage, comprising:

a reference signal source operative to produce a target signal;

an inductive circuit having first and second terminals and being responsive to an input voltage across the first and second terminals to store energy;

a first switching circuit coupled to the inductive circuit, the first switching circuit having a first control terminal and a first voltage terminal adapted to receive the supply voltage, the first switching circuit being responsive to a first of the clocking signals at the first control terminal to apply the supply voltage between the first and second terminals in a first direction;

a second switching circuit coupled to the inductive circuit, the second switching circuit having a second control terminal and a second voltage terminal adapted to receive the supply voltage, the second switching circuit being responsive to a second of the clocking signals at the second control terminal to apply the supply voltage across the first and second terminals in a second direction opposite the first direction; and

a comparing circuit having a first comparator input coupled to the reference signal source and a second comparator input coupled to the first or second terminal, the comparing circuit being responsive to the relative magnitudes of the target signal and the voltage of the first or second driving terminals to produce the first or second clocking signals.

6. The high voltage source of claim **5**, further including a first unidirectional circuit element coupled between the first driving terminal and the first terminal.

7. The high voltage source of claim **6**, further including a first bypass switch coupled in parallel with the first unidirectional circuit element, the first bypass switch having a first control terminal and being responsive to a respective one of the clocking signals to provide a first conductive path bypassing the first unidirectional circuit element.

8. The high voltage source of claim **7**, wherein the comparing circuit includes a first discharge output terminal coupled to the first control terminal and wherein the comparing circuit is configured to activate the first bypass switch in response to the magnitude of the voltage at the first driving terminal exceeding the magnitude of the target signal.

9. The high voltage source of claim **8**, further including a second unidirectional circuit element coupled between the second driving terminal and the second terminal.

10. The high voltage source of claim **9**, further including a second bypass switch coupled in parallel with the second unidirectional circuit element, the second bypass switch having a second control terminal and being responsive to a respective one of the clocking signals to provide a second conductive path bypassing the second unidirectional circuit element.

11. The high voltage source of claim **10**, wherein the comparing circuit includes a second discharge output terminal coupled to the second control terminal and wherein the comparing circuit is configured to activate the second bypass switch in response to the magnitude of the voltage at the second driving terminal exceeding the magnitude of the target signal.

12. The high voltage source of claim **7**, wherein the first unidirectional circuit element is a first diode.

13. A method of driving an electroluminescent lamp with a periodic lamp voltage, comprising the steps of:

providing a target signal corresponding to a desired lamp voltage, the target signal having a period;

charging an inductive circuit during a first portion of the target signal period;

comparing the lamp voltage to the target signal;

during the first portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is less than the magni-

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tude of the target signal, transferring part of the stored energy from the inductive circuit to the lamp; and

during the first portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is greater than the magnitude of the target signal, blocking transfer of the stored energy from the inductive circuit to the lamp.

14. The method of claim **13**, further comprising the steps of:

during a second portion of the target signal period, comparing the lamp voltage to the target signal;

during the second portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is greater than the magnitude of the target signal, partially discharging the lamp; and

if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is less than the magnitude of the target signal, blocking discharging of the lamp.

15. The method of claim **14**, further comprising the steps of:

charging the inductive circuit during a third portion of the target signal period;

comparing the lamp voltage to the target signal during the third portion of the target signal period;

during the third portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is less than the magnitude of the target signal, transferring part of the stored energy from the inductive circuit to the lamp; and

during the third portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is greater than the magnitude of the target signal, blocking transfer of the stored energy from the inductive circuit to the lamp.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein the step of during the first portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is less than the magnitude of the target signal, transferring part of the stored energy from the inductive circuit to the lamp includes charging the lamp in a first direction and wherein the step of during the third portion of the target signal period, if the magnitude of the lamp voltage is less than the magnitude of the target signal, transferring part of the stored energy from the inductive circuit to the lamp includes charging the lamp in a second direction opposite the first direction.

17. A method of driving an electroluminescent lamp with a lamp voltage, comprising the steps of:

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storing energy in a first circuit portion during a first interval;

comparing the lamp voltage to a desired lamp voltage;

producing a first error signal in response to the magnitude of the compared voltage being less than the magnitude of the desired lamp voltage; and

transferring some of the stored energy from the first circuit portion to the lamp in response to the first error signal.

18. The method of claim **17**, further comprising the steps of:

during a second interval producing a second error signal in response to the magnitude of the compared voltage being greater than magnitude of the desired lamp voltage; and

in response to the second error signal, partially discharging the lamp.

19. The method of claim **18**, wherein the desired lamp voltage is negative in third interval relative to the desired lamp voltage in the first interval, further comprising the steps of:

storing energy in the first circuit portion during the third interval;

comparing the lamp voltage to the desired lamp voltage;

during the third interval, producing a third error signal in response to the magnitude of the compared voltage being less than magnitude of the desired lamp voltage; and

transferring some of the stored energy from the first circuit portion to the lamp in response to the third error signal.

20. The method of claim **19**, further comprising the steps of:

during a fourth interval following the third interval, producing a fourth error signal in response to the magnitude of the compared voltage being greater than magnitude of the desired lamp voltage; and

in response to the fourth error signal, partially discharging the lamp.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO : 5,854,539
DATED : December 29, 1998
INVENTOR(S) : Pace et al.

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Title page,

item [73], denoting the Assignee, please delete "StMicroelectronics, Inc." and insert therefor --STMicroelectronics, Inc.--.

Following "*Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—", please delete "David V. Carlso" and insert therefor--David V. Carlson--.

In Column 4, Line 30, following "time t_4 ", please insert therefor--(The lowermost graph of Figure 2 is drawn on a scale such that 18 volts is the highest expected voltage across the lamp 44; the graph is the same but the scale different for an expected value of 75 volts across the lamp.)--.

In Column 5, Line 61, following "voltage V_{SINE} ", please insert therefor--(Again, as in Figure 2, the scale of Figure 6 illustrates a lower voltage than the 75 volts expected in one embodiment, but the Y axis can simply be scaled to show a maximum of 75 volts.)--.

In Column 7, Line 7, please delete "-CLK4" and insert therefor--, CLK3, CLK5--.

In Column 8, Line 30, please delete "CLK5" and insert therefor--CLK6--.